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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VILNIUS 001546

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB, EUR/RUS, EUR/RPM, AND PM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: NEW LITHUANIAN DEFMIN COMMITS TO CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR U.S. OBJECTIVES

REF: A. VILNIUS 1492

[1](#)B. VILNIUS 1380

[1](#)C. VILNIUS 1350

Classified By: POL/ECON OFFICER TREVOR BOYD  
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (U) This cable contains two action requests. Please see paragraph 13.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary. New Lithuanian Defense Minister Gediminas Kirkilas told the Ambassador that Lithuania would remain engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq during a December 21 tour d'horizon of our bilateral military-military relationship. A solid proponent of a strong USG-GOL relationship, Kirkilas's comments tracked with U.S. views on other key issues including Baltic air policing, ESDP, and Lithuanian interest in participating in a PRT in Afghanistan. A long-time MP, Kirkilas will focus more on the politics of his new position than did his predecessor. He will need time to get up to speed on the details of the more technical military issues. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (C) Kirkilas welcomed the Ambassador and the Embassy's pol-mil team at his first meeting with a foreign Ambassador since taking office December 14. The Ambassador and DefMin reviewed all aspects of our bilateral relationship with major issues highlighted below.

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Bilateral Relationship  
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[1](#)4. (C) The Ambassador noted to Kirkilas that the Embassy has had a traditionally active relationship with the Defense Ministry and that we look forward to deepening that relationship with Kirkilas on the job, particularly through a visit to the U.S. early in his tenure. Kirkilas said he would eagerly welcome such an opportunity.

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Iraq  
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[1](#)5. (C) Kirkilas affirmed Lithuania's continued participation in military operations in Iraq, and said that his staff is examining how it might be able to even increase its participation, resources permitting. He referred to increasing pressure in Poland for a Polish withdrawal, and expressed confidence that Lithuania would face no such pressures in the immediate future. The Ambassador thanked Kirkilas for the commitment, in particular for Lithuania's early and positive response to support NATO's training mission in Iraq. He noted that the Embassy is committed to help the government maintain popular support for its participation, including through its recently launched biweekly newsletter on developments in Iraq, which we send to political and opinion leaders. Additionally, the Ambassador urged that Kirkilas consider an early visit to Lithuanian troops on the ground in Iraq (and Afghanistan) to acquaint himself personally with coalition operations. He expressed an interest to do so.

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Afghanistan  
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[1](#)6. (C) The Ambassador commended the performance of Lithuanian special forces in Afghanistan, who just departed to return to Lithuania to train for participation in the NATO Reaction Force. While we understood the need to withdraw, the Ambassador urged that Lithuania keep its commitment to return in 2006.

[1](#)7. (C) Kirkilas said the GOL is interested in participating in a PRT in Afghanistan, but has concerns about the cost of such an undertaking. The Ambassador recommended that Lithuania continue to take a leadership role and recommend to its Baltic neighbors that they pool their resources for a single Baltic-PRT. We observed that the cost of the initiative depended upon the goals of the mission and agreed to share information about cost estimates. (Note: The Lithuanians are under the impression that the start up

and one-year operating costs would be about 40 million euros.) Kirkilas also thought the January 25 deadline for declaring intention to mount a PRT posed a problem. Kirkilas said that a Lithuanian government team would likely visit Afghanistan in January with support from the U.K. in order to explore PRT participation options.

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Bilateral Assistance and Procurement  
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18. (C) The Ambassador said that the USG military assistance to Lithuania should remain level and is expected to provide approximately \$5 million in FMF assistance and \$1.2 million IMET funding to Lithuania in 2005. Highlighting the recent GOL purchase of Javelin missiles, the Ambassador pledged continued assistance in GOL efforts to procure other equipment including radios and night vision goggles for troops deployed abroad. The Ambassador also assured Kirkilas of continued support in providing opportunities for members of Lithuania's armed forces to study in U.S. service academies, praising the success of the twelve students now enrolled.

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Baltic Air-Policing and Russia  
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19. (C) The Ambassador affirmed U.S. support for NATO's air-policing operations covering the Baltic States and noted likely U.S. participation in the mission in 2005. He also commended Lithuania's constructive approach in cooperating with Russia's Vienna Documents (VDOC) inspection of military sites including the Zokniai airfield, in October (ref C). Lithuania's constructive approach to Russia had enhanced regional security in the past, noted the Ambassador, and we strongly encourage the continuation of such a policy.

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Two Percent GDP Allocation  
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10. (C) The Ambassador strongly encouraged the GOL to fulfill NATO's recommendations to allocate two percent of GDP for national defense. The Ambassador applauded Kirkilas's public statements in support of the allocation, and remarked that NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer had recently raised the issue with President Adamkus. Concurring that the two percent issue is very important, Kirkilas said he would work to "find new decisions" on the issue (reftel B). Kirkilas conceded that some involved in the budgetary process were not sensitive to the realities of the defense budget or of the need for Lithuania to continue force transformation following NATO membership.

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ESDP  
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11. (C) The Ambassador noted the USG support for European security and defense, but cautioned that ESDP neither duplicate NATO nor diminish the capacity of NATO members to meet NATO commitments. Kirkilas concurred that NATO must remain the primary guarantor of security in Europe. Kirkilas said that Lithuania was not facing significant pressure from Europe to pledge more defense assets to ESDP.

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Georgia  
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12. (C) Kirkilas described engagement with and support for the South Caucasus as a high GOL and MOD priority, and noted that the GOL had pledged assistance in Georgia's preparations for a bid for NATO membership. He said that Georgia approached the GOL seeking a transfer of Soviet weapons to Georgian defense forces, and raised a GOG request to the GOL to transfer 1,000-2,000 U.S. M-14 rifles to Georgia's national honor guard forces, and that the GOL now sought USG approval of the transfer. The Ambassador welcomed Lithuania's engagement with Georgia and encouraged Kirkilas in his contacts with the Georgian leadership to discourage any new military action in South Ossetia, which would impede solution of the problem and endanger Georgia's NATO aspirations.

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Action Requests  
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13. (C) Action Requests.

A. We request that the Department provide guidance on the GOL transfer of 1,000-2,000 M-14s to the GOG.

B. We request information on the possibility of Lithuania postponing past January 25, 2005 a declaration of its intentions regarding participation in a PRT.

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Comment  
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14. (C) It is clear that Kirkilas will need time to come up to speed on military issues. His political background, familiarity with the intricacies of Lithuania's Coalition government, and leadership role within his party and parliament (he remains a MP and the Social Democratic Party's Deputy Whip) may serve the MOD well during contentious budgetary battles. We will continue to actively engage Kirkilas on issues of interest, and recommend that we create opportunities for travel to the U.S. as well as to Iraq and Afghanistan to help him become familiar with the issues as quickly as possible.

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